

Reflection Paper

Subject: Writing Assessment- Indicator 4

Grade: Kindergarten

Module 4: Assessment for Active Learning : Teacher implements instruction in order to engage students in rigorous and relevant learning and to promote their curiosity about the world at large by:

Selected Indicator: Providing students with assessment criteria and individualized, descriptive feedback to help them improve their performance and assume responsibility for their learning.

Goal:

I will learn about and apply strategies for providing students with Kindergarten writing assessment criteria and individualized descriptive feedback, and as a result, student writing achievement will be enhanced as students take responsibility for their learning.

Initial Summary:

As I reflect on the current practices in assessing students writing achievement within my classroom, I realize that although I have been providing students with an overview of expectations for completion, I often times do not include students in the evaluation process. After completing a unit of study or addressing a learning objective, I provide students with a writing assessment task and score the piece based on identified criteria aligned with the Common Core and district learning objectives. Throughout the grading process, I generally provide students with a simple star on their paper for satisfactory completion with occasional student-friendly comments highlighting the weaknesses of their written work. I feel as though the majority of my students are not reaching their potential in producing satisfactory writing pieces that demonstrate their thoughts adequately. Students are frequently handing in work that does not have proper punctuation, spacing, and capital letters when needed regardless of the teacher models or expectations provided.

Reflection:

In reflecting on my current practices as an educator and reviewing my current placement on the Continuum of Effective Teaching, I began to realize that I was struggling in finding ways of communicating writing assessment results at the kindergarten level. Rather than including students

in the assessment process, I would typically collect student work and assign a numerical grade based on the district writing rubric. Although I often times would highlight areas of concern on the papers that were less than satisfactory, I realized that all students would benefit from understanding both strengths and weaknesses of their written work. In completing writing assignments, the majority of students within my classroom were not producing satisfactory products. Students were frequently neglecting basic components necessary for written communication, such as, punctuation and proper placement of uppercase and lowercase letters. I was spending a great deal of time in redirecting students that were lacking details in their accompanying illustrations and rushing through their work overall.

While discussing the correlation between assessment and learning with my mentor, I was directed towards a wealth of resources and professional growth opportunities. Prior to beginning my study, we examined the importance of formulating and utilizing a preassessment to drive my instruction and determine appropriate future assessment models. Carol Ann Tomlinson discusses the importance of doing so in her text Leading and Managing a Differentiated Classroom and states, "preassessments and formative assessments become mechanisms to inform teacher planning, create a match between student needs and classroom instruction, and provide helpful feedback to students on their progress" (145). As I developed a preassessment to evaluate students' writing within my classroom, I worked closely with my mentor and Literacy Facilitator in determining key components to be evaluated and scored. In doing so, we reviewed the Common Core standards of learning and the district kindergarten writing curriculum. The criteria that we decided would be used to evaluate the preassessment work sample included crucial kindergarten writing skills. This contained utilizing punctuation, capital letters at the start of a sentence, appropriate spacing, sound spelling (beginning, median, and ending sounds within words), and neatness while formulating a coherent written response. After attending a district meeting focused on modes of assessing student learning, I was introduced to a unique template adapted from Research for Better Teaching that provides teachers a visual of students' achievement across evaluated areas. Both my mentor and Literacy Facilitator decided this form would be beneficial in utilizing to document and score each writing prompt and identify students' requiring additional teaching among specific areas of the writing being evaluated.

After designing and implementing the preassessment for students' writing, I began to evaluate the data in utilizing both the District Writing Rubric and the template adapted from the Research for Better Teaching. In doing so, I found that students were on average receiving a score of 2.78 out of 6 and the majority of students were not utilizing punctuation or appropriate spacing. This information provided me with the knowledge needed in moving forward with planning future instruction and forming small groups for intensive re-teaching among identified areas.

As I continued my professional growth in assessing student learning within my classroom, I met with the Literacy Facilitator once more, this time discussing methods of improving students' writing within my classroom through providing appropriate feedback. After discussing current practices within the classroom, the Literacy Facilitator suggested the academic benefits in utilizing conferencing with students. She stated that students would gain a sense of independence as they assumed ownership of their writing and with appropriate modeling and practice, the number of redirections required due to off-task behaviors would decrease overtime. In reading Classroom Instruction That Works by Robert J. Marzano, Debra J. Pickering, and Jane E. Pollock, the authors explore a variety of studies researching the effects of feedback on student achievement. The authors state that "the best feedback appears to involve an explanation as to what is accurate and what is inaccurate in terms of student responses. In addition, asking students to keep working on a task until they succeed appears to enhance achievement" (96). In response to the

reading and meeting with my Literacy Facilitator, I decided to implement conferencing during the writer's workshop time slot within the daily classroom schedule.

As a result of this new learning and the implementation of conferencing, I decided to formulate a conferencing log/schedule in order to ensure that I would be able to meet the needs of all learners within the classroom and provide appropriate timely feedback. Prior to beginning conferencing with individual students, I modeled the process of sharing and critiquing one's own writing to strengthen the final product during the conferencing process. I also had student volunteers within the classroom model the act of writing without interrupting the conferences taking place at the teaching table within the classroom. The student volunteers modeled quiet working at their seats and provided others a visual portrayal of the classroom expectations during this new process.

Once I altered my practices, and students were exposed to timely feedback through the conference model, I noticed that the majority of students seemed to take a greater sense of pride in their written work and were eager for their turn to have their writer's conference. As I was offering students corrective feedback as well as positive feedback, I began to realize the benefits of this process within my kindergarten classroom. I noticed that the number of redirections and interruptions decreased, for each student knew that they too would have an opportunity to meet with me and discuss their writing. I also noticed that I was able to have time to explain concepts to students that were missing specific components in their writing, and help them through the editing process.

In addition to implementing the conferencing process to provide students with adequate timely feedback, I also wanted to advance further across the Continuum of Effective Teaching and improve the overall quality of my instruction. After attending a district meeting discussing a variety of assessment techniques across all grade levels, my mentor had suggested that I try utilizing one of the methods we had learned about. The presenter of the material discussed a study by DeAnn Huinker and Janis Freckmann, which examined the benefits of including students in the process of developing the evaluation criteria. It was suggested that this inclusion method aids students in setting and achieving learning goals. With this acquired knowledge, I also learned of the benefits of utilizing student-friendly rubrics in allowing students to monitor their academic progression. In reading the text entitled Learning Targets: Helping Students Aim for Understanding in Today's Lesson by Connie M. Moss and Susan M. Brookhart, the topic of rubric use is explored and the benefits of including students in the assessment process are evaluated. The authors state that "a rubric for a complex performance...helps students set and aim for short-term goals for today's lesson and build toward long-term goals" (55). With this in mind, I decided to implement both strategies within my classroom.

Prior to developing a student-friendly rubric, I decided to include my students in the process through creating a chart identifying all necessary components of a written prompt. The students brainstormed a list of such items as I recorded their thoughts. During this time, all students were eager to share their knowledge, as all hands were raised to offer their ideas and opinions. This increase in classroom participation and willingness to collaborate provided an opportunity to observe the benefits in using this strategy. After our list was completed, I reviewed the student generated criteria with the class and then compared it to my own teacher oriented writing rubric. The students were surprisingly able to identify all areas that had been deemed essential in completing a kindergarten writing assignment. After completing this activity with the students, I referred back to this chart daily as they worked to create their own writing assignments. The students seemed to truly enjoy creating and

reviewing the list and began referring to this throughout the school days. One student remarked, "Can you please move our writing chart so I can see it better, it helps me think when I write." As time went on, students' work began to improve overall, as I noticed that I was redirecting less often, and more students were beginning to utilize appropriate spacing, uppercase letters at the start of a sentence, and punctuation.

Once I observed these positive student behaviors in relation to the practice of including students in the evaluation process, I developed a student-friendly rubric with picture cues for students of all academic abilities to use when self-evaluating their writing. In forming this rubric, I made sure to include components of the student-generated list as well as my own teacher oriented rubric to maximize the overall student involvement. With this being the first experience in using rubrics at the kindergarten level, I wanted to ensure that students received ample modeling and practice of this self-evaluation process. As I introduced the rubric and its purpose to the class, I made sure to tell students that they had helped to create the criteria presented on the rubric through their brainstorming activity. The students cheered with excitement as I announced this and unveiled the final product. After reviewing the steps in completing the rubric, I modeled this with an exemplary piece of student work along with a less than satisfactory piece of writing I had created for the purpose of the lesson. Students then practiced this as they evaluated their own writing. While a few students required additional modeling of this, the majority of students were able to check their own work with the help of the rubric and edit any errors that had been made. The students worked diligently and minimal redirections were required as students appeared excited to take on this task.

Throughout this professional growth experience, I have accessed a wealth of resources which have truly improved my knowledge of assessing student learning and the overall writing performance within the classroom. Prior to beginning this learning experience, I noticed that I was redirecting students a great deal within my writing block and was spending critical time in reminding students of the essential writing components. I also struggled in finding ways of communicating constructive criticism at the kindergarten level which resulted in students receiving minimal feedback on completed assignments. After providing students with opportunities to develop their own evaluation criteria, the students seemed to gain a sense of educational ownership as they continue to reference this daily during the writing block. The students have also continued to improve their writing through self-evaluating their work using both the writing conferences and rubrics. I have noticed that the students within my classroom are continuing to improve in truthfully reflecting on their writing progress with each day that passes. After assigning the post-assessment to evaluate the student affect throughout this process, the average student writing score increased from 2.78 out of 6 to 4.2 out of 6, resulting in a satisfactory increase. As I continue to conference with students and provide timely feedback through this model, I notice that students are beginning to reflect deeper and add more details to their work. In furthering student learning and achievement within my classroom, I plan to incorporate these strategies across the curriculum areas and provide an authentic learning experience for all within my classroom.